

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07

FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 USIA-06 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03

SP-02 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 DODE-00 PA-01

PRS-01 /063 W

----- 032078

P R 300954Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4313

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 7929

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CG, ELAB, PINS, PINT

SUBJECT: MOUNTING MALAISE IN ZAIRE

REF: A; KINSHASA A-138 AND A-151 B; KINSHASA 7723

C; LUBUMBASHI A-46

1. ECONOMIC-FINANCIAL CRISIS IN ZAIRE HAS BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY SLOW BUT STEADY DETERIORATION OF SOCIAL CLIMATE. FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM - LOSS OF PURCHASING POWER OF MASSES - HAS BEEN COMPOUNDED BY VARIETY OF OTHER PROBLEMS, MANY OF WHICH GOZ GENERATED. RADICALIZATION MEASURES OF DECEMBER 1974 ALIENATED PRIVILEGED CLASS WITHOUT WINNING NOTABLE SUPPORT AMONG LOWER INCOME GROUPS. NATIONALIZATION OF SCHOOLS, COMPULSORY "CIVIC SERVICE", RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONX, ETC. IRRITATED VIRTUALLY ALL SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY. FACT THAT GOZ HAS SINCE TRIED TO BACK QUIETLY AWAY FROM SOME OF THESE MEASURES HAS, IF ANYTHING, CONTRIBUTED TO DEEPENING POPULAR CONTEMPT FOR GOVERNMENT UNABLE TO EFFECT ITS GRANDIOSE PROGRAM, OR TO COPE WITH BASIC
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SUPPLY, DISTRIBUTION AND PURCHASING POWER PROBLEMS.

2. FOR MOST ZAIRIANS, PURCHASING POWER IS PROBLEM WITH SHARPEST PERSONAL IMPACT. MOBUTU'S LONG-PROMISED WAGE ADJUSTMENT WAS FINALLY ANNOUNCED IN SKTAGES BEGINNING IN EARLY AUGUST (REF "B"). ADJUSTMENTS IMPOSED SEVERE CUTS IN UPPER WAGE BRACKETS WITH NO COMPENSATING INCREASES AT LOWER END OF SCALE, PROCEEDS GOING INSTEAD TO GOZ TREASURY. WHILE ONLY PERSONS EARNING MORE THAN \$302 A MONTH WERE CUT DIRECTLY, LOWER PAID WORKERS WERE ALSO ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY LOSS OF YEAR-END BONUSES AND BY OTHER MEASURES. DETAILS OF THESE MEASURES WILL BE REPORTED SEPARATELY.

3. COMING AS THEY DID IN PERIOD OF SEVERE INFLATION AND GROWING ANTICIPATION OF SUBSTANTIAL WAGE INCREASES, THESE CUTS RESULTED IN A SERIES OF SPONTANEOUS WORKSTOPPAGES IN THE KINSHASA AREA BEGINNING AUGUST 25. WALKOUTS OCCURRED IN METAL PROCESSING, MEDICAL SERVICES, AND BUS TRANSPORT. PTT LONG DISTANCE LINES SABOTAGED. UNUSUAL GOZ SHOW OF FORCE (NO VIOLENCE) HAS THUS FAR BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL IN PERSUADING WORKERS TO RETURN TO JOBS. IN ONE INSTANCE, GENERAL BUMBA TOOK DELEGATION OF 8 WORKERS TO NGALIEMA TO VOICE GRIEVANCES DIRECTLY TO PRESIDENT. MOBUTU REPORTEDLY PROMISED TO LOOK INTO MATTER. GIVEN PRESENT MOOD, HOWEVER, WORKERS ARE UNLIKELY TO SETTLE FOR VAGUE PROMISES.

4. WORKER ACTION WAS SPONTANEOUS. "TRADE UNION" UNTZA IS NOW WAY INVOLVED, EXCEPT IN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO TALK WORKERS BACK TO WORK. PRESTIGE OF UNTZA SECRETARY GENERAL KIKONGI - NEVER VERY HIGH - IS NOW AT ALL-TIME LOW. FAILING CONCESSION BY GOVERNMENT, WILDCAT WALKOUTS ARE EXPECTED TO PROLIFERATE. SEASONED OBSERVERS, NOT GIVEN TO PANIC, FEEL THAT MOBUTU MUST FIND QUICK MEANS TO DAMP THIS SPONTANEOUS SURGE OF OPPOSITION. WHILE GOVERNMENT IS FAULTED FOR MANY OTHER OMISSIONS AND COMMISSIONS, MOST SERIOUS AND IMMEDIATE PROBLEM IS PURCHASING POWER.

5. ONE WAY OUT MIGHT BE ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW GOVERNMENT
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SHAKEUP, IDENTIFYING SCAPEGOAT FOR WAGE FIASCO. WHILE SHAKEUP COULD COME AT ANY TIME, IT MAY BE DEFERRED UNTIL AFTER COMPLETION OF "COUP MANQUE" TRIAL WHERE VERDICT EXPECTED SEPTEMBER 1 OR 2. BUT, WHATEVER THE SCENARIO, ODDS ARE THAT MOBUTU THE PRAGMATIST WILL FIND SOME WAY THROUGH CURRENT CRISIS. LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES OF US FIRMS BELIEVE SOLUTION WILL INCLUDE RESTORATION OF ALL OR PART OF WAGE CUTS. REAL

CAUSE FOR CONCERN, HOWEVER, IS THAT GOVERNMENT THROUGH
MISMANAGEMENT AND NEGLECT OF SOCIAL PRIORITIES COULD
HAVE ALLOWED SITUATION TO DEGENERATE TO PRESENT POINT.
WALKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR RELATIONS, ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, FINANCIAL STABILITY, WAGE CONTROLS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, POLITICAL SUMMARIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975KINSHA07929
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750301-0303
From: KINSHASA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975082/aaaaaazy.tel
Line Count: 119
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 KINSHASA A-138, 75 KINSHASA A-151, 75 KINSHASA 7723
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <28 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MOUNTING MALAISE IN ZAIRE
TAGS: ELAB, PINS, PINT, ECON, CG
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006